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Pacification Does Not Spell Peace

The reported start of a new phase of the "pacification" program in South Vietnam suggests one more dreary round in Washington's policy there, a policy which seems unable to learn anything, or even see anything, from past errors.

Top priority in what is called a new program, but which actually sounds like nothing more than a beefed-up effort to save the old one, is given to "neutralization" of the Viet Cong political apparatus, according to a report from Washington. Yet this is what pacification experts claimed, in Senate hearings in February, 1970, they had just about accomplished. The fact is that the pacification program has been highly controversial, even among Vietnamese, since it began during the Johnson administration, and in the 1970 hearings some doubt was voiced by program leaders themselves about whether the plan had, over-all, accomplished any real good.

The worst aspects of the old plan are all too conspicuous in the so-called new one. The emphasis on military subjugation seems clear in projects such as these: Expansion of a "people's intelligence (or spy) network" to inform military authorities of suspected enemy activity; the setting up of a quota system requiring "elimination" of 14,000 Viet Cong agents or suspected VC agents this year; distribution of 700,000 more weapons to the People's Self-Defense Force and expansion of that force to include women in combat units and children over 7 in support units. (Why

not some Junior Spy units, too?)

Maybe the intentions are good. But all the foregoing items smack to us of the old body-count syndrome which can lead to further brutalization of the South Vietnamese populace, more uprooted families, and a tighter grip on them by the Thieu-Ky junta. It could also mean a flood of spiteful accusations by one neighbor against another, all ending in an extensive new dossier system—which we presume stems from that recently used by the Pentagon against civilians in our own country.

Although the "new" pacification plan includes sections on care of veterans (who have been shamefully treated by the Saigon regime), and orphans and refugees, too, the whole operation still is under the control of the U.S. military and the CIA. These are positively the last two agencies in government which should be handling social reconstruction in South Vietnam. And we can see no relief whatever in the idea of eventually transferring this program to the hands of the Saigon militarists.

The futility and wrong-headedness of this approach are fairly reflected in President Nixon's reported view of pacification as a vital cog, dovetailing with his so-called Vietnamization plan which itself has been no howling success. Taken together, the two discredited concepts, in the larger picture, can only mean more Vietnamese killing more Vietnamese with hardly any attention given to national reconciliation or political accommodation, both of which are basic requirements for peace.